

## **Building Relationships**

Jo Eva Gaines: My board experiences started in the '80s. I had never been on any kind of board. And it was with Child and Family Services. And that was the beginning. And I was coaxed into joining this board, and I was like a deer in the headlights. But since then, I have become board savvy, I think. I've served on boards of education, school committees, nonprofits, and one for profit.

It's vital that families are part of the decision-making process and are not given directions that are decisions of someone else, that they feel ownership in what they're doing. So without the parents, you don't make valid decisions. I make sure that everybody at the table has a piece of the decision-making process. If someone is sitting there and not voicing an opinion, I will ask them. I'll draw them out.

And one way to make sure that people start to build that confidence is to put them on subcommittees. Let them work with a small group. Let them grow. And when they come to the table, they feel more empowered to voice their opinions.

We had a little thing that we did was called "everyone bring one." So the parents who were active would bring a parent who was not active to an activity, a meeting, or whatever function that we were having. And that way, we increased attendance. And people would come back, then, on their own once they had been there. So I've learned a lot from Head Start. I've had my own head start education.

In today's society, serving on boards is a major, major effort because it's time consuming. And there are accountability issues that your funding sources are looking for. So people tend to shy away from that.

I think if anyone is asked to serve on a Head Start board, they should first be given a tour of a Head Start facility. Once they see those kids, they aren't going to be able to say no because they'll know the value of the program, and they'll put everything else aside and want to be a part of it.